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ABSTRACT

The synthesis of four instructional models for argumentative writing--the Toulmin, Hiduke, Winder, and Crebbe-Debate approaches--with basic discourse theory produces a practical and positive method of teaching college students to write effective persuasive essays. A battery of questions based on a modified communication triangle--subject (problem), writer (rhetoric) and audience (opposition)--helps students to analyze argument components. Adapted from the Crebbe-Debate approach, peer evaluation of arguments emphasizes the importance of the audience in persuasive essays. Combining inductive analysis of writer, subject, audience, and sense of audience immediacy with solid organizational options, this method teaches students not simply what weakens arguments, but how to write good persuasive essays. (Questions for analysis are included within the text.) (MM)

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TEACHING PERSUASION: A POSITIVE APPROACH

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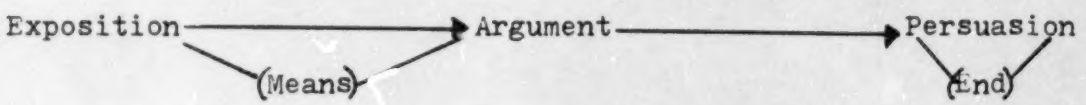
A student in my Freshman English class told me her father has been a professional gambler for some thirty years. The student said her father views gambling as a "skill that can be taught, learned, and practiced--a skill too many people confuse with luck or chance." There is, I think, an instructive parallel between the attitude of inexperienced card players toward gambling and the attitude of many students toward writing.

Students often doubt whether they can be taught to write at all, let alone wield a pen well enough to compose a thoughtful, readable essay. Often they feel the process of writing is an arbitrary exercise: they write a paper and if they are lucky, they receive a good grade. It they're not lucky, they fail. But we as composition teachers can, in a relatively short time, begin to prove to our students that learning to write is more a matter of learned skill than of chance or luck. We can offer ways to DO things and we can tell students WHY something is working or not working.

Yet, for those of us who base our Freshman Composition course on a discourse-theory progression from expressive to expository to persuasive writing, by the time we get to persuasion we can lose what might be our strong suit. Until we begin to teach persuasive writing, we are able to instruct our students what to do: "Use strong verbs," Write honestly," "Maintain a clear focus." We can give our students clear and substantive directions for devloping and improving their writing skills. In short, we emphasize the positive. And though our pedagogical instincts, if not our experience, tell us that we do want to competently teach the all important skill of persuasion, there is a hitch: we can more easily identify what makes persuasion fail than we can articulate and/or teach what makes it succeed.

So, when we teach persuasion, we swing too much toward negative instruction, telling students what NOT to do. We tell them about logical fallacies, and we tell them why it is important not to make a "non sequitur" or "argument ad hominem" blunder. We tell them not to antagonize their audience; we tell them not to use analogy as fact, not to generalize from a particular. This negative-virtue approach is reinforced by many of the texts we use, which mostly warn against the common logical errors, without giving much solid and practical instruction on what a writer can and should do to produce an effective persuasive essay. It is like telling someone NOT to draw to an inside straight--without telling him he can or should hold his high card and draw four more.

And not only is negativism a problem with current methods of teaching persuasion, but persuasion itself is as difficult to define as it is to teach.[1] Most often, argument is considered as distinct from persuasion, a separate branch of rhetoric. But rather than consider argument as divorced from persuasion, I think it more accurate to see argument as a means to which persuasion is the end. Exposition, then, is seen as a necessary means to argument. Hence, exposition leads to argument which leads to persuasion:

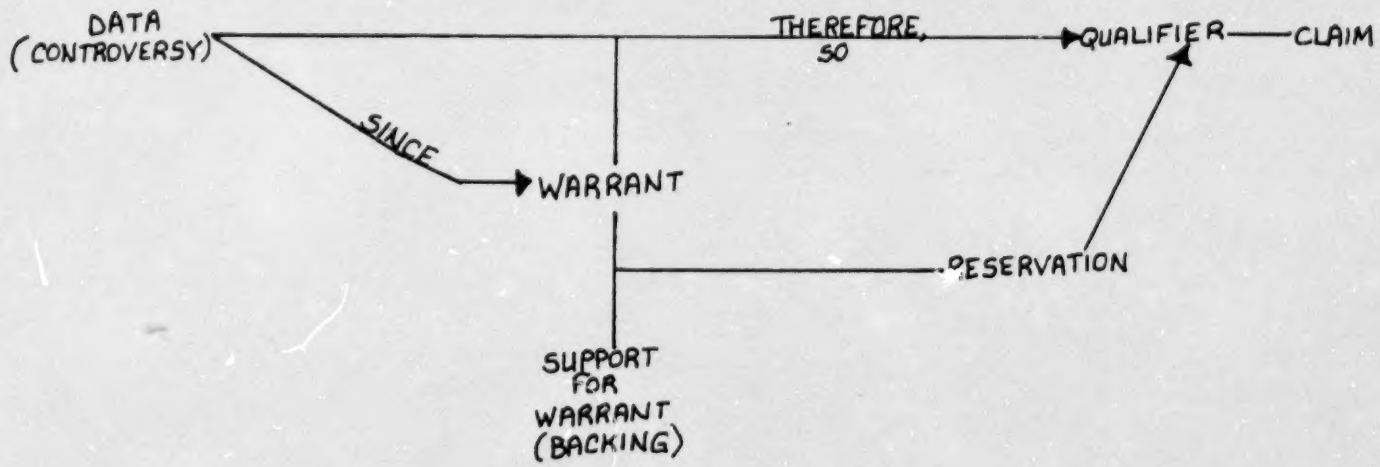


The writer must first inform and explain his topic to substantiate an argument; the quality of his argument determines the degree to which he persuades his audience. So, when we teach persuasion we must invariably include argumentation. A good argument should have the

effect of persuading the reader.

With this as a basic principle, I propose a synthesis of some of the approaches offered throughout research in the last ten years. So we may fully grasp such a synthesis, let me briefly outline four "positive approaches" I blend into my synthsized positive form.

The Toulmin Model: The Toulmin Model enables the "imputed relation between claim and evidence to be more easily grasped and more specifically criticized" by identifying the components of a proposition as "data," "claim," "qualifier," "warrant," "backing," and "reservation."[2] The approach then ties together the relationship among these components.



Example: (DATA) The historical consensus of opinion is that an unstable balance of power lead to World War I. (DATA) World leaders today recognize that nuclear weapons are creating an imbalance of power. (CLAIM) Therefore, nuclear weapons development (QUALIFIER) might lead to World War III, (WARRANT) since the imbalance resulting from continued development would be essentially similar to the power imbalance prior to World War I. (BACKING) Both imbalances were characterized by an arms race and dynamic power blocks. (RESERVATION) Our only hope is that fear of nuclear war will be an effective deterrent.[3]

The advantage of the Toulmin Model is that it offers solid guidelines for organizing a proposition or argument; it clearly defines components

helpful in arranging an argument. However, one disadvantage is that it does not offer suggestions for anticipating audience opposition. It merely assumes the writer will know the correct "qualifier" or"reservation" to insert. It also seems to ignore the role of the writer; it pays no attention to the writing process itself, but rather it offers a structure for the product.

The Hiduke Form: This approach presents an organizational format for writing a persuasive essay. In the classroom Hiduke emphasizes "public writing," the students' need to expose their writing. In pursuit of this objective Hiduke uses "group theme, audience analysis, practical research, and publication."[4] He offers the following format as a means of organization:[5]

1) Introduction
2) Problems with the Status Quo
3) Definition of a Solution
4) Application of the Solution
5) Answers to the Opposition
6) Elimination of All Alternative Solutions
7) Conclusion

One of the strengths of the approach is that it enables the students to expose their writing to others besides the teacher; it encourages active interaction between the writer and his audience through publication. Its weakness, however, seems to me to be that it would consume too much time. In the Freshman Composition classroom, in the average part of the semester spent on persuasion, it would be unlikely that students could produce more than one essay if the goal is polished, publishable writing. I feel students should be able to write on a variety of topics so they can master the technique through practice.

The Winder Approach: The underlying philosophy of this approach

is that "students should be taught to recognize their own values and to become sensitive to the values of others as expressed in their writing....No paper of argument can be clear without the explicit statement of that value system."[6] To define values students must first define the "facts" and "concepts" behind the value:

FACTS: The measurable quantities of the world

CONCEPTS: Integrating factor which gives meaning to the facts

VALUES: That which enables us to guide our lives; they are beliefs that we hold with reference to our experience and that are used to evaluate or structure experience.

Example:

PROBLEM: Students feel that they cannot have an adequate learning experience under a system of grades.

FACTS: Our school rewards and punishes students with grades.
Students who usually receive failing grades drop out.
Students frequently cheat to get good grades.
Students study for exams rather than for knowledge.
Students do not help each other learn.

CONCEPTS: Learning involves much more than learning material for exams.
It is easier to be honest in a non-competitive situation.
Students learn more through collaboration than through competition.
Grades do not permit sensitivity to differing rates of learning.

VALUES: Collaboration
Respect for individual differences
Authentic learning
Honesty

SOLUTION: Our school should operate on a pass-fail basis.

PROBLEM: Students cannot learn adequately unless they are subjected to a grading system.

FACTS: Students' rate of learning goes up before an exam.
Students are motivated to study because of exams.
There is a positive correlation between length of time studying and good grades.
There is a positive correlation between a high grade-point average and good pay after graduation.

CONCEPTS: A non-competitive system is unfair to better students who deserve a good reward.

CONCEPTS: Competitive people are more successful than non-competitive people
(con't)

VALUES: Competition
Success
Respect for Authority

PROPOSITION: Our school should operate on a grading system.

The advantage of this approach is that it is flexible enough to allow students a choice to maintain and defend the status quo or to defend their own solution/proposition. It also gives an in-depth analysis of both the "problem" and the "solution" and therefore audience anlaysis is built-in. A disadvantage, however, is that, because of the nature of values themselves, the approach is conducive to subjective argumentation. In the hands of inexperienced writers such an approach could produce a degree of subjectivity inappropriate to effective persuasive writing.

The Crebbe Debate Approach:[7] The Crebbe Debate Approach uses the primary elements of debate (one side vs. another) as a means to persuasive writing. It requires students to generate their own topic, to research it, and to propose it to an audience for consideration and opposition.

Steps:

1) The class compiles a list of debatable topics generated from "brainstorming" and journal excerpts.

2) The student decides on a topic he cares about.

3) The teacher pairs up students on the basis of the students' decision of a topic. (Partners should be on opposite sides of an issue)

4) Students read at least five newspaper or magazine articles concerning both sides of their issue.

5) Students converse with their partner so they may understand each other's point of view.

6) Students then write an essay of approximately 500 words presenting one side of the issue.

In this approach the writer has a clear idea of his opposition's point of view; he has a sense of the immediacy of his audience. Also, the approach leads the writer from the beginning of the writing process, generating a topic, to the point of actually writing the paper. Yet it offers no suggestions for organizing a coherent argument; nor does it offer advice for choosing specific points of opposition with which to work, or ways of limiting the breadth of the opposition.

All these approaches have strong points, but I think a synthesis would render an effective and perhaps more thorough and positive way to teach persuasion to Freshman English students. In my suggested approach I try to extract the advantageous elements of the Toulmin, Hiduke, Winder, and Crebbe methods and combine them with basic discourse theory. As I have indicated earlier, I design my course around the communications triangle and devote equal emphasis to the respective "corners." When we begin persuasive writing I tell students the audience "corner" will be their primary consideration, but that persuasion relies on the most intimate relationship of all three corners; it is the culmination of the writer and subject's involvement with the audience. In my approach I suggest the following principles and strategies.

PRINCIPLES: a) Expostion → Argument → Persuasion
(Means) (End)

b) Subject= Problem

A problem or controversy must exist with the status quo. If there is no problem, then why argue?

Audience=Opposition

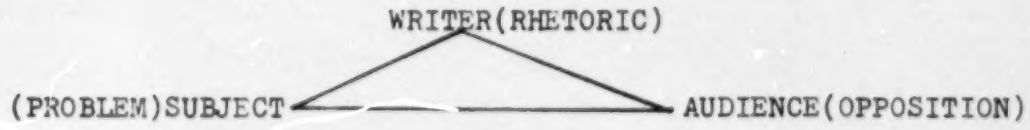
The audience should be considered as those who hold an opposite or different point of view from the writer. Note

that "opposition" should not imply any element of hostility.

Writer= Rhetoric

> The writer's primary concern should be with rhetoric, with how to sway the audience to his point of view about the subject; his means of doing so is with his choice and arrangement of words. At the barest level, the writer IS his words.

This, then, produces an altered or ammended version of the communication triangle:



With these principles in mind, I then use journals, free-writings, and essays as groundwork for subject selection. I feel beginning writers need to be committed and sometimes familiar with their topic to write well. However, I also feel we should teach students the rhetorical tools that would enable them to write effectively on any topic, whether they "like" it or not. One goal of my approach is to provide them with the persuasive skills and tools they can apply elsewhere than just the composition classroom, not to indulge them only in topics in which they have a personal interest, concern, or involvement.

The following is a battery of questions designed for the students to analyze to inductively approach the components of an argument.

<u>Subject/Problem Guidelines:</u>

1) Do I have an arguable proposition?
   (Can I argue that parents SHOULD love their children?)
2) Is my argument necessary?
   (Is it necessary or worthwhile to argue to a general audience

that no one should be allowed to wear yellow tennis shoes on Thursdays in Uttumwa, Iowa?)

3) Is my topic arguable in a 4-5 page essay?

(Have I effectively limited my topic? Is it too broad? Too specific? Example: Could I effectively argue that the United States should or should not operate on a two party system, given a 4-5 page limitation?)

4) Can I find enough evidence to develop and support my stance?

(Without doing exhaustive research, could I find enough information to argue one side of the Truman/MacArthur feud?)

5) What are the facts, values and concepts attached to my topic?

Audience/Opposition Guidelines:

We must remember the time limits imposed on us in a semester course, and therefore exquisitely detailed, time consuming, and highly sophisticated methods of audience analysis are unteachable in a freshman class. The following questions are, I think, thorough without being ridiculous.

1) Who is my audience? Just who is it to whom I am directing my argument and ultimately trying to persuade?

* (This is often more difficult for students to determine than we imagine. Students never seem to quite forget who is the "absolute" final audience)

2) What can I reasonably assume my audience expects from me as a writer?

(What expectations have to be met in order to establish and/ or maintain my credibility?)

3) What are the audience's emotional involvements in this issue?

(If I am arguing to abolish the Social Security System, I must consider those in my audience who receive Social Security benefits and those who have made Social Security payments throughout their lives.)

4) What are their key sources of information?

(What newspapers and magazines might my audience read? Do they associate with people who might know a lot or only

a little bit about this topic? Should I risk (or dare) argue to a group of English teachers that the National Enquirer provides profoundly literary and intellectually challanging reading material?)

5) What are their main opinions I will need to address?

(If I am arguing that textbooks should not be censored, then I should anticipate having to address some of my argument to the strongest, most prevalent points of say, the conservative moralists.)

6) What part of the opposition is the weakest? The emotional side? The logical side? The economical side? The ethical side?

(If I am arguing for the expansion of the Space Shuttle Program, my opposition's most vulnerable spot might be the emotional side; without being too heavy-handed, or too corny, I could reasonably appeal to their sense of adventure, conquest, exploration, and discovery.)

7) What will antagonize my audience the most?

(Most times I probably do not want to do this, so I will need to anticipate where and what their "sore spots" might be. If I am arguing to abolish grading, addressing myself to a group of faculty members, would it be wise to say that ALL teachers grade unfairly, hence grades are not accurate at all?)

[This is usually a good place to stress instruction on the logical fallacies.]

8) What facts, concepts, and values can I presume my audience to hold concerning this topic? Given what I know about my audience and their viewpoint,"how shall I presume?"

Writer/Rhetoric Guidelines:

1) What voice, tone, and persona do I want to use to give me the greatest degree of credibility and reliability?

(If I am arguing for or against the abolition of medical treatment for the terminally ill, do I want to use the voice of the "humble entertainer?")

2) What level of language will be most effective and appropriate for my topic and my audience?

(If I am arguing to a group of concerned citizens from a small rural town that toxic waste dumps should not be permitted in their community, I probably don't want to use overly scientific jargon lest my points get lost.

I need to decide whether I want language that renders me scholarly, sophisticated, folksy, formal, casual, etc.)

3) How much exposition do I need?

(How much can I assume my audience already knows about my topic? If I am writing on a topic quite familiar to my audience, do I need to extensively review the topic before launching into my argument? Example: Would a group of professional chemists need a lecture on molecule structure before understanding my argument on the harmful side effects of certain drugs?)

4) What is the strongest part of my argument?

(Just what is the best part of my argument to stress? Is it the logical side? The emotional side? The economical side? The logical side?)

5) How can I best structure my argument?

(Hiduke Approach? Toulmin Model? My own format that seems to best suit the nature of my argument?)

6) Which of the rhetorical modes would best suit my needs and my purpose in this argument?

(Could I use the narrative mode within the logic of the Hiduke form? Comparison and Contrast? Classification?)

7) As I am proof reading and reworking the rough draft, what words do I want to choose for the greatest degree of effectiveness in any given sentence?

(One question I want to ask myself of every sentence is, "Is this the best and most effective way that I can say just what I mean?")

So that students need not hypothesize the answers to all of these questions and risk faulty guessing on too many counts, I pair them up and use the strategies of the Crebbe-Debate Approach. One student plays the devil's advocate, the opposition, and in essence answers many of the writer's questions about both subject and audience. The opposition then becomes both immediate and helpful for the writer.

After the debate, students bring a rough draft to the next class and I put them with the same partner as before. Instead of playing each other's "devil," they will now work with one another on the rhetoric of the paper. (In short--I use peer tutoring techniques) The opposition can tell the writer just what he needs to be persuaded. We then spend this class period as a "rough draft workshop."

After the "workshop," I have the students work as a whole class, together analyzing and discussing some other sample student essays on a different topic. In the meantime, students work on their papers out of class. The final essay is due approximately two class periods after the rough draft workshop.

The combination of the inductive analysis of writer, subject, and audience, and the sense of immediacy of the audience through the debate, as well as solid organizational options, equips students with practical, usable instruction for writing an effective, thorough, and successful persuasive essay. Most importantly, students learn what to <u>do</u> to write a good persuasion paper and we as teachers are able to tell them what they can and should do. It is simply not enough to tell students what not to do in persuasive writing. We have to be able to deal the right cards so they can play the aces.

FOOTNOTES

[1] In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century most rhetoric textbooks did not agree on a definition of argument or persuasion. Two main themes appear in their definitions of argument: (1) that argument can be negatively defined as something that is not expository; (2) that argument should be broken down into two strategies, one of inducing belief and the other of inducing action.

A.M. Tibbets, "Rhetoric Textbooks," CCC, XVIII (Dec. 1967), p.238.

[2] Charles W. Kneupper, "Teaching Argument: An Introduction to the Toulmin Model," CCC, XXIX (Oct. 1978), p. 239.

[3] Ibid., p.239.

[4] James J. Hiduke, "Public Writing: The Aggressive Dimension," CCC, XXV (Oct. 1974), p. 304.

[5] Ibid., p. 303.

[6] Barbara D. Winder, "The Deliniation of Values in Persuasive Writing," CCC, XXIX (Feb. 1978), p. 55-56.

[7] Katharyn Crebbe, "Debate Writing: An Approach to Writing Arguments," CCC, XXVII (Oct. 1976), p. 292.